

**In the Claims:**

1. (Currently amended) An implement for manipulating a knotted suture during a surgical procedure, comprising:

an elongated shaft having a proximal end engageable by the user for manipulating the instrument, and a distal end engageable with the knotted suture to be manipulated;

said distal end of the elongated shaft having an end face formed with a recess for receiving the knot of the suture;

~~characterized in that~~ wherein said distal end of the elongated shaft is formed with an open slot starting from a location spaced from said end face and extending along the outer surface of the elongated shaft to said recess in said end face, such as to enable the knotted suture to be introduced into the slot and the recess by effecting a sidewise movement of the knotted suture with respect to the elongated shaft, or vice-versa; ~~and in that said~~ the open slot ~~[[is]]~~ being formed with a first section leading from said recess towards said proximal end of the elongated shaft, and a second section leading from a juncture with said first section back towards said distal end of the elongated shaft but terminating short of, and proximal to, said end face; ~~said second section of the open slot decreasing in width from said juncture to its end terminating short of said end face, the end of the second slot section coming to a v-shape.~~

2. (Original) The implement according to Claim 1, wherein said open slot is formed of a width to accommodate a wide range of suture sizes and materials.

3. (Cancelled)

4, (Previously presented) The implement according to Claim 2, wherein said first slot section is formed in a plane at an angle of 10–30 degrees relative to the longitudinal axis of the elongated shaft.

5. (Previously presented) The implement according to Claim 1, wherein said second slot section is formed in a plane parallel to the longitudinal axis of the elongated shaft.

6. (Original) The implement according to Claim 5, wherein said first slot section is formed in a plane at an angle of 10–30 degrees relative to the longitudinal axis of the elongated shaft, and the plane of said second slot section is rotated approximately 90 degrees with respect to the plane of said first slot section.

7. (Previously Presented) The implement according to Claim 6, wherein the width of said first slot section also gradually decreases from said juncture toward said recess in the end face of the distal end of the elongated shaft.

8. (Original) The implement according to Claim 7, wherein the inner surface of said slot engageable with a suture is rounded at said juncture of first and second slot sections.

9. (Original) The implement according to Claim 1, wherein said distal end of the elongated shaft formed with said recess is of increased outer diameter, said open slot also extending through said distal end of increased outer diameter to said recess to facilitate loading the suture into said open slot.

10. (Original) The implement according to Claim 1, wherein said implement further comprises a tubular cutter member enclosing said elongated shaft and formed with an annular cutting edge engageable with a suture in the open slot of said elongated shaft upon movement of the elongated shaft with respect to the tubular cutter member, or by vice-versa.

11. (Original) The implement according to Claim 10, wherein said implement further comprises a releasable latch for normally retaining said elongated shaft in an initial position wherein its distal end projects outwardly from the distal end of said tubular cutter member.

12. (Original) The implement according to Claim 10, wherein the proximal end of the elongated shaft, and the proximal end of the cutter member, include handles pivotally mounted to each other to permit manipulating the implement and a suture received in said open slot of the elongated shaft, and actuating the implement to cause the cutter member to cut-off an excess length of the suture.

13. (Currently amended) An implement for manipulating a knotted suture during a surgical procedure, and for removing an excess length of a suture, comprising:

an elongated shaft having a proximal end engageable by the user for manipulating the implement, and a distal end engageable with the knotted suture to be manipulated;

said distal end of the elongated shaft having an end face formed with a recess for receiving the knot of the suture;

said distal end of the elongated shaft being further formed with an open slot starting from a location spaced from said end face and extending along the outer surface of the elongated shaft to said recess in said end face, such as to enable the knotted suture to be introduced into the slot and the recess by effecting a sidewise movement of the knotted suture with respect to the shaft member, or vice-versa;

said open slot being formed with a first section leading from said recess towards said proximal end of the elongated shaft, and a second section leading from a juncture with said first section back towards said distal end of the elongated shaft but terminating short of, and proximal to, said end face; ~~said second section of the open slot decreasing in width from said juncture to its end terminating short of said end face, the end of the second slot section coming to a v-shape; and~~

a tubular cutter member enclosing said elongated shaft and effective to cut said suture in said slot upon movement of the elongated shaft with respect to said tubular cutter member, or vice-versa.

14. (Cancelled)

15. (Previously Presented) The implement according to Claim 13, wherein said first slot section is formed in a plane at an angle of 10–30 degrees relative to the longitudinal axis of the elongated shaft.

16. (Previously Presented) The implement according to Claim 13, wherein said second slot section is formed in a plane parallel to the longitudinal axis of the elongated shaft.

17. (Currently amended) The implement according to Claim 16, wherein ~~first~~ said first slot section is formed in a plane at an angle of 10–30 degrees relative to the longitudinal axis of the elongated shaft, and the plane of said second slot section is rotated approximately 90 degrees with respect to the plane of said first slot section.

18. (Original) The implement according to Claim 17, wherein said distal end of the elongated shaft formed with said recess is of increased outer diameter, said open slot also extending through said distal end of increased outer diameter to said recess to facilitate loading the suture into said open slot.

19. (Original) The implement according to Claim 13, wherein said distal end of the elongated shaft formed with said recess is of increased outer diameter such as to define an annular finger-piece to facilitate introducing the suture into said slot, said open slot also extending through said annular finger-piece to said recess.

20. (Original) The implement according to Claim 13, wherein said implement further comprises a releasable latch for normally retaining said elongated shaft in an initial position wherein its distal end projects outwardly from the distal end of said tubular cutter member.